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THE STORY OF A NATIVE CALIFORNIAN

BY H. D. BARROWS.

(Read Nov. 7, 1898.)

There is living in this city a native Californian now in his 84th year, and still hale and hearty, whom I have known since 1855, or for more than 40 years. Last year (1897) I took down for the Historical Society some of his recollections of the olden time, together with a few items of personal history, which I herewith present for preservation in the archives of our society:

Ramon Valenzuela, whose present residence is on Seventh street, near the historical Coronel homestead, was born at the Mission San Gabriel, August 31, 1815. His father was Don Gaspar Valenzuela, a native of Santa Barbara, and his mother's name before marriage was Maria Ygnacia Lopez; she was a daughter of Claudio Lopez, for many years principal manager or mayordomo of the then immense missionary establishment of San Gabriel, and right-hand man of Fathers Sanchez and Salvadea. This Claudio Lopez was a very capable man, and he was entrusted with the general management of the various ranchos that were in those days subject to the San Gabriel Mission, including San Bernardino, Ucaipe, El Chino, San Jose, Cucamonga, Santa Anita, Rosa de Castilla, San Pasqual, etc.

Don Ramon, the subject of this sketch, who lived during his boyhood at the Mission, remembers well his grandfather Lopez, and that, as a boy, he used often to go around with him in the vineyards and orchards of the mission, which were extensive. He says his grandfather planted the orange orchard south of the church, which is still in existence and is still, I believe, productive; as well as the large vineyards that flourished in the time of Father Sanchez, but which since have died out; also the "Tuna" (prickly-pear) hedges, portions of which still exist. Large areas of land were cultivated in grain and other crops each year during his long administration of the temporal affairs of the mission. Great numbers of Indians were then under the control of the Friars; and they were made to work in all manner

of useful occupations. Of these laborers Don Claudio had general charge, as well as of the capacious adobe warehouses at the mission, which were the scenes of a busy life, but which, like the actors—overseers and laborers—have entirely disappeared; indeed, to the greater portion of the present generation they are as if they had never existed.

Don Ramon says that they used to slaughter some twelve or fifteen bullocks each Saturday to feed the Indian laborers of the mission alone, besides those killed at the several ranchos.

The plains at that period were covered with cattle, horses, sheep, goats, swine, etc., i.e. *con ganado mayor y menor*.

The various industries carried on at the mission at that period were the making of saddles, fabrics of wool, such as coarse blankets, stuffs to clothe the Indians, etc., and the manufacturing of wine, brandy, oil, soap, blacksmithing, etc. Near the mission there was a large "Jaboneria," where whole hogs were dressed and tried out for conversion into soap.

Don Gaspar, father of Ramon, was a soldier from San Diego, stationed with the small force of eight men and a sergeant at San Gabriel, where he married a daughter of Claudio Lopez. Of the eleven children of Gaspar, five are still living, namely: Ramon, in this city, and Jose Ygnacio at La Ballona; Maria, married to Pedro Ybarra; Estéfana, widow of José Sepulveda of San José; Cesaria, widow, first of Ygnacio Aguilar and second of Lorenzana of this city.

Ramon, the subject of this sketch, was married to Asencion Serrano, by Father Tomas Esténega, in 1840, at San Gabriel Mission. To them 14 children were born, of whom 5 sons and 4 daughters are still living, mostly in Los Angeles.

In 1828 Don Gaspar, father of Ramon, after many years of faithful service at the mission, was discharged from military service, and came to the Pueblo as a citizen, and was granted a lot on the east side of San Pedro street, northeast corner of what is now Fifth street, where he planted a vineyard and orchard, and where he lived till his death, which occurred in 1849.

Claudio Lopez (Ramon Valenzuela's maternal grandfather) while still mayordomo at the mission, had commenced planting an orchard and vineyard in the Pueblo on the west side of San Pedro street, opposite the place of his son-in-law, Gaspar, and between the huertas

of Eugenio Valdez on the north and of Encarnacion Urquidez on the south. Other early settlers on the east side of San Pedro street and north of Gaspar's place, were Guillermo Cota and Antonio Maria Lugo. What was the vineyard of the latter is now crossed by Second street, and his residence was the long adobe building, still standing, north of the present home of his granddaughter, Mrs. Woodworth.

Mrs. Valenzuela, wife of Ramon, who still enjoys excellent health, was born at San Gabriel in 1827. Her father was Tomas Serrano, a ranchero, and her mother's maiden name was Nicolasa Navaja.

When Don Pio Pico took possession of San Luis Rey, he placed Serrano in charge as mayordomo, and later Serrano was appointed as administrator of the rancho of Santa Margarita.

When Don Ramon and his prospective bride were about to be married, Father Tomas Esténega, who was to solemnize the nuptials, remarked her youthfulness, and concluded that before performing the ceremony, he would consult the record of the date of her baptism, and he found that she was just 13 years 3 months and 3 days old. But Ramon says her parents thought well of him, etc., and so consented to her marriage thus early.

Though Ramon Valenzuela is past the age of four score years, his memory of past events continues unimpaired. His remembrances of the part he took in military actions pending the change of government are very vivid. He was a cavalryman at the Dominguez rancho affair, where the Californians compelled the Americans to retreat with considerable loss. José Antonio Carrillo was commandante of the Californians, about 60 in number, who were mounted but without arms, except the small cannon known as the "old woman's gun." But as the Americans had no cannon, they were compelled in self-defense to maneuver in solid column, which enabled the Californians to draw up their cannon by means of their riatas hitched to the horns of their saddles, fire into a compact mass of infantry at comparatively close range, with deadly effect, and then turn and ride rapidly to the rear, where, out of range, they could load again, and so repeat the operation indefinitely, without serious loss on their side. The Americans were forced to withdraw, carrying their dead with them, which they buried on "Dead Man's Island." And so ended that incident.

Afterwards Valenzuela went with the force commanded by Gen. Andres Pico to San Diego, and engaged the Americans at San Pasqual, the Californians at this time being armed with lances and riatas, which California horsemen always carried when mounted. The Californians captured one cannon from the Americans at San Pasqual. From thence the Californians retired to San Bernardino, and then to San Bartolo, where the final action of the war took place.

The Californians did not possess the resources or arms to enable them to contend with any hope of success against the Americans.

Later, Col. Fremont and Gen. Pico made a treaty of peace, known as the "Treaty of Cahuenga," thus ending the war.

Valenzuela says that the failure to prevent the passage by the Americans of the San Gabriel River at the Pass of San Bartolo, made it clear to the Californians that a further struggle was absolutely hopeless, so he, with others, came to town and gave up the contest.

After California became a permanent portion of the United States the native Californians, inheritors of Spanish civilization, adjusted themselves, as best they could, to the new regime, i.e., to American ways, manners and customs, to American laws; in short, to American domination. In this difficult transition a portion of the native Californians were fortunate in having one or more American friends whom they could look to for counsel, while others trusted false friends to their undoing.

Of the former class of Americans—too rarely few in numbers—William Wolfskill and Benjamin D. Wilson, the pioneers, are two notable examples. Speaking from considerable personal knowledge and from the uniform testimony of many native Californians, I think I can say with truth that those two—possibly other—noble pioneers always and without exception, gave good and honest and disinterested advice to the paisanos, i.e., to the Spanish-speaking people of the country, whenever the latter came to them asking for counsel, under the new order of things. Ramon Valenzuela's admiration, even veneration, for Mr. Wolfskill—for "Don Guillermo," as he was known by all the Californians—was unbounded. He and Mr. Wolfskill were for many years, both before and after the change of government, near neighbors and near friends. And, knowing Mr. Wolfskill intimately, as I did, it afforded me pleasure to hear Señor

Valenzuela, now a venerable octogenarian, say, when I was taking down these notes, that "Don Guillermo" Wolfskill had been like a father to him.

And so I have often heard the older native Californians uniformly speak with warm affection of "Don Benito" Wilson, whose friendship for them and for their race had ever been so disinterested and so honorable.

The Californians, as well as the Americans, who took part in the stirring events connected with the change of government, now more than half a century ago, will soon all have passed away.